

Message Text

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ACTION ORM-02

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1185

INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC REP GUAM MARIANAS ISLANDS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SREF, VS, BM

SUBJ: VIETNAMESE REFUGEES ON BURMESE VESSEL

REF: STATE 171439, RANGOON 2405

1. PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES ABOARD
BURMESE MV AVA CARRIED OUT JULY 11 WHEN CONSULATE AND INS
OFFICERS DROPPED FROM HELICOPTER SLINGS TO DECK OF VESSEL
AS IT CIRCLED 20 MILES OUTSIDE HONG KONG TERRITORIAL WATERS
UNDER ESCORT OF ROYAL NAVY GUNBOAT. ELOQUENT LETTERS FROM
REFUGEES TO CONGEN AND RED CROSS SAID THEY ESCAPED TO FREEDOM,
BUT DID NOT KNOW WHERE TO TURN. REFUGEES ARE MIXED GROUP OF
FARMERS, FISHERMEN, MERCHANTS, AND EX-SOLDIERS. ALMOST ALL
SAY THEY WANT TO GO TO THE US. WHOLE GROUP APPEARS TO BE
FROM SAIGON AREA. SUBJECT TO VERIFICATION, 39 OUT OF THE
TOTAL 99 APPEAR TO QUALIFY UNDER FORMER REFUGEE PROGRAM
CATEGORIES. ABOUT 90 PERCENT OF THESE HAVE RELATIVES IN THE US.
DETAILS OF QUALIFICATION AND CATEGORY VERIFICATION REQUESTED
FOLLOW SEPTTEL.

2. ACCORDING TO AVA'S CAPTAIN, 98 (MISSON BORN JULY 5) REFUGEES
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PICKED UP EVENING OF JULY 4 WERE IN DESPARATE SITUATION ON

DRIFTING, SINKING 30-FOOT FISHING VESSEL 150 MILES OFF COAST OF VIETNAM IN SOUTH CHINA SEA. CAPTAIN SAYS AVA COPING WITH UNEXPECTED PASSENGERS AND RATIONED FOOD AND WATER WILL LAST FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER FOUR TO FIVE DAYS. LEAVING REFUGEE PROBLEM ASIDE, HE NEEDS TO ENTER HONG KONG TO REPROVISION AND UNLOAD 1800 TONS OF TEAK. NEXT SCHEDULED PORTS OF CALL ARE ALL JAPANESE - KOBE, YOKOHAMA, KIMITSU, YOKAICHI - BEFORE SHIP RETURNS TO RANGOON.

3. HK DIRECTOR OF IMMIGRATION, MARTIN ROWLANDS, TOLD CONGEN AVA HAS BEEN REFUSED ENTRY BECAUSE OF POSSIBILITY REFUGEES MIGHT TRY TO JUMP SHIP AND BECAUSE BURMESE HAVE FAILED TO ACCEPT BASIC RESPONSIBILITY FOR REFUGEES THEY HAVE ACQUIRED. HOWEVER, HE CHEERFULLY ASSISTED CONGEN EFFORT TO INTERVIEW REFUGEES AND ARRANGED FOR HKG HELICOPTER TRANSPORT TO SHIP.

4. IN JULY 11 CALL ON CONSUL GENERAL CROSS, BURMESE CONSUL GENERAL, U THAT WE, TOOK MORE RESPONSIBLE LINE THAN SUGGESTED BY ROWLANDS. HE WAHS APPRECIATIVE OF USG OFFER TO INTERVIEW EFUGEES AND INVESTIGATE, WITHOUT COMMITMENT, POSSIBLE US ACCEPTANCE OF SOME REFUGEES. AT SAME TIME, HE RECOGNIZED NECESSITY FOR BURMA TO ACCEPT ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR REFUGEES AND THEIR POSSIBLE EVENTUAL LANDING IN RANGOON. MEANWHILE, BURMA IS APPARENTLY CONTACTING UNHCR IN EFFORT TO OBTAIN HIGH COMMISSION INTEREST IN SITUATION OF THIS REFUGEE GROUP.

5. WHILE AVA WAS CRUSING AND WAITING OUTSIDE, HKG VESSELS JULY 10 ESCORTED OUT OF HK WATERS VIETNAMESE JUNK WITH SIXTEEN REFUGEES WHICH HAD SLIPPED INTO COLONY AND HAD BEEN APPREHENDED LAST WEEK. VESSEL WAS REPAIRED, REFUELED, REPROVISIONED, AND PROVIDED WITH SIMPLE NAVIGATIONAL EQUIPMENT BEFORE BEING SENT ON ITS WAY WITH THE PRONOUNCEMENT IT WAS "SEAWORTHY". (AS DEPARTMENT KNOWS, WE CONSIDER VESSEL UNFIT FOR ANY EXTENSIVE CRUISING ON HIGH SEAS). HKG IMMIGRATION DIRECTOR TOLD CONGEN OFFICER THE REFUGEES HAD GUTS, GRUB, AND MONEY, AND WOULD MAKE OUT. HE PASSED TO REFUGEES MESSAGE THAT HE ADMIRED THEIR COURAGE AND DETERMINATION AND THAT THE FARTHER THEY SAILED FROM VIETNAM AND THE MORE ENTRY REFUSALS THEY ACCUMULATED, THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BETTERN WOULD BE THEIR CHANCE FOR EVENTUAL ACCEPTANCE. ROWLANDS TOLD CONGEN OFFICER HE THOUGHT THEY MIGHT TRY FOR TAIWAN OR THE PHILIPPINES, AND THEN PERHAPS GUAM. NOTING THAT HKG HAD EXPELLED VESSEL DAY BEFORE WE HAD BEEN TOLD THEY WOULD LEAVE AND WHILE WE WERE STILL WORKING ON POSSIBLE ELIGIBILITY OF REFUGEES, CONGEN OFFICER OBSERVED THAT HK IMMIGRATION WAS "ALL HEART."

6. NEITHER ONE OF THESE LATEST REFUGEE GROUPS APPEAR TO BE

PARTICIPATING IN AN ORDINARY PAID "SNAKE BOAT" OPERATION. THESE ARE RISKY ONE-WAY VOYAGES, BUT IT IS NOT CLEAR HOW THEY ARE ORGANIZED AND WHO IS PAID TO DO SO. IT IS CLEAR, AS OUR PREVIOUS TELEGRAM ON THE GROUP OF SIXTEEN POINTED OUT, THAT THERE WILL BE MORE SUCH GROUPS AND PERHAPS MANY MORE SO WE NEED A POLICY.

7. ACTION REQUESTED. WHILE DEPARTMENT IS FORMULATING POLICY FOR HANDLING OF CONTINUING INTERMITTENT FLOW OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES, WE RECOMMEND INTERIM SPECIAL ADMISSION FOR ELGIBLES FROM AVA AS ACT OF SIMPLE HUMANITY. BECAUSE OF TIME INVOLVED IN EVEN MOST EXPEDITIOUS PROCESSING, REMOVAL MAY HAVE TO WAIT FOR AVA'S CALL AT PORTS BEYOND HONG KONG. CROSS

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